

**Mayor's Committee on Integrity and Trust
in Local Government**

**Town Hall Meeting
Palo Alto College
January 8, 2002 7:00 P.M.**

Committee Members Presiding:

Dr. Ana M. "Cha" Guzman (chair); Wayne Alexander; Bob Ross; Dr. Charles Cotrell; Carlos Montemayor; Diane Cortez; Reverend Charles Johnson.

Meeting Convened:

On January 8, 2003 at 7:00 P.M., Dr. Ana M. "Cha" Guzman convened the Town Hall Meeting of the Mayor's Committee on Integrity and Trust in Local Government at the Palo Alto College Performing Arts Center. Dr. Guzman welcomed the public and made opening comments, explaining the work of the Committee and the procedures for the meeting. Dr. Guzman stated that several members of the Committee were bilingual and that people could give their statements in Spanish if they wished. She repeated this information in Spanish.

Dr. Guzman introduced the members of the Committee present. She further explained that the Committee had divided itself into four research teams made up of the following members:

The Ethics Code Review Subcommittee: Members are General William McBride, Auxiliary Bishop Patrick Zurek and Dianne Cortez.

The Discretionary Contracts and Zoning Subcommittee: Members of this group are Dr. Tessa Martinez Pollack, former councilman Bob Ross, Carlos Montemayor and Deanna Frisk.

The Campaign Finance Subcommittee: Members of this group are Dr. Charles Cotrell, Dr. Richard Gambitta, Dr. Morris Stribling and Wayne Alexander.

The Character Education Subcommittee: Members of this group are Dr. Ana "Cha" Guzman, Rev. Kenneth Allen and Rev. Charles Johnson.

Dr. Guzman stated that speakers would be called in the order that they had signed up on the sign up sheets and that each speaker would be limited to 5 minutes. She noted that that the Committee would not be able to address or resolve individual complaints or grievances with the City or City personnel.

She stated that after the four public meetings, the Committee would begin its work on its report to Mayor Edward D. Garza setting out its recommendations by January 31, 2003.

Speakers

List of Speakers: Attachment 1

1) Henry Avila: Mr. Avila is a former councilman and now represents the South Side on the Zoning Commission. He has been with the Zoning Commission for approximately 5 months. Mr. Avila stated that it has been a trying experience to work on the Zoning Commission while the indictments are pending. Mr. Avila advised that the chairman of the Zoning Commission would like to assist and be a part of the Committee's work on issues concerning zoning procedures.

Mr. Avila supports pay for the members of City Council and term limits, but thinks they should be extended to six or eight years. As a member of Council, a member of the Zoning Commission and a father of three, Mr. Avila has always expressed the values of honesty, integrity and morality. No amount of money could change his mind. He reiterated his request that the Committee make the Zoning Commission a part of this process.

2) Christel Villarreal: Ms. Villarreal is with Citizens for Ethical Government and Smart Growth. Ms. Villarreal would like all citizens to have equitable treatment. She believes there should be transparency in the process. She also supports reforms in campaign finance law because large contributors have an inordinate influence.

Ms. Villarreal also supports full disclosure of contributors' occupations and employers. She further stated that lobbyists should provide disclosure of all contacts with city officials in relation to the city contracts, the rental of city land and for zoning variance requests. She would like to see this information available on line.

She stated that there should be a contribution limit of \$250 per election and a ban on contract awards to campaign contributors for two years following a contribution, i.e. "pay to play" legislation. She supports clean money elections and an independent Ethics Review Board with the power to subpoena witnesses and to investigate. She wants the process to be more transparent.

She is in favor of paying more to city council members, which would allow more people to run for office. She believes having four two-year terms would allow council members to develop greater expertise.

Mayor Welcomed

Dr. Guzman welcomed Mayor Garza as he arrived to observe the proceedings.

3) Nancy Englebert: Ms. Englebert stated that it should all come down to honesty and integrity. She has been the president of the Westlakes/1604 Neighborhood Association. She believes that the lobbyists have control of the City government. People initially run for office because they care and want to help. But once in office, before a citizen gets to

the microphone at a Council meeting, the lobbyists and the corporations have already gotten the deal they want.

She believes that contributions should be limited to \$500. If someone gives you \$5000, you will not vote against them. Council members should be paid so that they can focus on the business of representing people. Term limits should be eliminated so that good people can stay in office.

4) Rene Neira: Mr. Neira stated that she is a long-time Southsider since 1961. He has attended City Council meetings and felt compelled to come to the Committee's Town Hall meeting tonight. He feels hopeless and that the effort is in vain, but he cares about local government. The events at City Hall are not a surprise, but they are a shock. He stated that council members should be compensated a little more, perhaps around \$20,000 a year. It would show that we appreciate their efforts and would lessen the temptation to engage in unethical activities.

Mr. Neira also noted that he had enrolled in Palo Alto College. His tuition is free because he is a senior, but a second-hand textbook cost him \$65. He is hoping that something can be done to help with the high cost of books.

5) Francisco C. Salas: Mr. Salas said he was not surprised that Lila Cockrell was not one of the Committee members in attendance tonight. He recalls only Mayor Peak and Mayor Cisneros coming to his part of town. He used to live in Phoenix, which managed to get three professional sports teams to come even though that city is in the middle of a desert. He stated that he did not know how the council members got by on \$20 per meeting. He noted that problems with the water system and on Villaret Road had not been fixed. He said that these two councilmen were not the first.

6) Gregor Schlumdl: Mr. Schlumdl has been a citizen for 50 years on the Southside and he appreciates this meeting and believes there should be more. He believes the Southside has been harassed by San Antonio and that minor changes will not fix the problems. He feels the Southside has little representation. This auditorium should be full with citizens. When he talked with other people about coming to this meeting, the others said that coming to this meeting was a waste of time.

There have been problems for years, but people do not know what to do. People do not vote because they do not believe they have a say. When they protested the annexation, they were laughed at.

Campaign contributions are actually legal bribes. People cannot afford to run for office but we need people who care. This is America and we are Southsiders and we want to be heard. There is no trust or faith in local government. It is too big a city to be run by a few people. He suggested having 3 or 4 council members for each district and that there should be more town hall meetings.

Mr. Schlumdl stated that if San Antonio were voted the number one city for its use of its taxes, then why do the citizens have to pay fees for so many services. He also asks why the City is paying \$600,000 to Donald Trump for the Miss America pageant. Councilmen do not return calls.

7) Naomi Ramirez: Ms. Ramirez believes that sometimes people do not listen to the Southside. She was a student at Palo Alto and then Texas A&M. She supports giving compensation to Council members. She also supports setting limits on contributions and banning contributors from seeking city contracts. She is concerned that the presence of campaign donations might cause council members to overlook the merits of the matters before them.

People believe that voting is for the upper class. She knew another student who had ideas of what he would do if he were in office, but he will not run because he does not have enough money. She said that it was difficult to find information on the City's Internet page about how to run for office. If it were easier and less intimidating to find this information, maybe more people would run.

8) Arthur Emerson: Mr. Emerson is with the Chamber of Commerce and serves on its Subcommittee on Integrity and Trust. He provided the Chambers proposed recommendations. Attachment 2. The Chamber believes that the Mayor's Committee should not recommend measures that would make it more difficult 1) for good, qualified people to run for office; 2) for small, minority and women-owned businesses to apply for and receive City contracts and participate in the political process; 3) good, honest local professional firms to apply for and receive City contracts; or 4) for the general business community to do business with the City.

The Chamber supports reasonable limits on contributions and the disclosure of contributors' occupations and employers. It strongly opposes publicly financed campaigns. It does support the extension of term limits and the elimination of the lifetime ban on running for office after the current term limit expiration. It supports increased compensation for council members, as well as additional ethics training upon entering office. The Chamber also believes there should be an anonymous hotline for ethics infractions.

Mr. Emerson said the Committee should take its time to complete its work. When the opportunity for comment is too short, there is a perception that the outcome is preordained. He urged the Mayor to extend the deadline. He pointed out that the document he provided included survey results on the opinions of the Chambers' membership on the issues being considered by the Committee.

9) John W. Adams: Mr. Adams believes that Council members should be paid. People cannot learn what they need if they have to work elsewhere. They over-depend on staff. Expenses need to be limited. Whether there is a real or perceived conflict, such conflicts need to be eliminated.

He has served as a president of the Southwest Homeowners' Association. His experience with the Zoning Commission had good results, but there were problems with getting sufficient notice about meetings.

He noted that the Councilmen were innocent until proven guilty, but they were in a bind.

The City is behind on fixing roads and working on flood control. We have problems because we are broke.

He stated that citizens had fought for a year against the Heatherwild Estates housing project. When the matter was before Council, the members went into Executive Session where the citizens cannot know what is going on.

10) Mariana Ornelas: Ms. Ornelas thanked the Committee for holding the meeting. She is a 20-year resident of San Antonio. She lives on the Northside, but works on the Southside at Palo Alto College. She expressed the utter disappointment and outrage that the Council did not listen to the citizens or consider their petition on the PGA debacle. She feels the Council members are thumbing their noses at the citizens and listening more to the lobbyists and developers at the expense of the environment.

She supports paying a salary to Council members to prevent conflicts. Council should be a full-time job. Term limits should be extended to keep good people in office.

11) John Courage: Mr. Courage is with the Citizens for Ethical Government. He provided a position statement from this organization. Attachment 3. He is concerned that private financing of campaigns undermines the process of democracy. Campaign contributors have undue influence, which violates the principle of "one person – one vote." It undermines public confidence and creates the danger of actual corruption. Private financing of campaign lets those who can afford to seek office have disproportionate access to the media. Officeholders are distracted with fund-raisers. The current system compels them to give more attention to contributors. The private contributions are also lost to City revenues because the money is going to campaigns instead of commerce.

The CEG supports clean money voluntary campaign financing, which would provide four to one matching funds to participating candidates. There should be a \$100 contribution limit to reduce the influence of the rich and level the playing field. With voluntary participation, candidates can be required to limit expenditures. The CEG also seeks the disclosure of contributor's occupations and the identity of their employers. It supports a two-year ban on awarding city contracts to contributors, i.e. "pay-to-play" legislation.

The CEG supports giving the Ethics Review Board subpoena and investigation powers; compensation for Council members and extending term limits to four two-year terms. Mr. Courage stated that he hoped the Committee had the strength and determination to support such measures.

12) Claude Bernal: Mr. Bernal stated that he agreed with John Courage. For many years, the Southsiders had watched garbage dumps and salvage yards come to their part of town, but he appreciates that there are few traffic jams. He would like to see a website for neighborhood planning. He wants stricter rules for council members and open bookkeeping because corruption has always been there.

13) David Fernandez: Mr. Fernandez stated that he had been at the brunt of a \$500 fine imposed by the City Council. He said that he was proud to say he had stood up to corruption at City Hall. When he ran for Council, he sought no contributions. He lost the campaign but kept his integrity. He wanted to challenge all candidates not to take money. He felt that the root of the problem was the Council's lack of respect it had for the public. It costs nothing to walk the streets and meet people. He further stated that change is necessary and that the Committee should do all it can to ensure that it does not happen again.

14) Ricardo A. Martinez: Mr. Martinez ran a grassroots campaign for Council. His support was from small contributors. He feels Council members should get a living wage to support their families. He noted that the San Antonio Express News had chosen to endorse people who were later indicted. He stated that term limits should be up to the voters. Term limits originally came to be because of problems with the officeholders. Mr. Martinez stated that he is a social worker. Social workers are required to follow a Code of Ethics. The City's Ethics Code needs more meat.

Beatriz Casanova and John Herrick were called, but did not come forward.

15) Jason Scheppers: Mr. Scheppers has been a Southside resident for six months. He noted that individuals meet privately with members of the Zoning Commission, the Planning Commission and Council. He stated that Council courtesy causes member of Council to follow the lead of the district's Councilperson. He noted that those who are represented by councilmen under indictment may not be well represented. He asked about whether ethics complaints had been filed. The Ethics Commission should print a report stating who had received money in the month before an election. Councilmen work hard but they will do what it takes to get elected. Mr. Scheppers supports three 2-year term limits and no lifetime ban.

16) Diana Kryzic: Ms. Kryzic related that she had been a couple of public meetings, which she sometimes felt were in vain. As an example, she explained that she tried to get her street fixed for 25 years. Originally, it would have cost \$53,000 to fix the two blocks. The cost would now be \$300,000. After working for many years, hers was one of 32 families ousted. They had come to the public meetings and told the Council their priorities. After 25 years, she never dreamed she would be ousted from her home and not be paid. She was told going to this meeting would be useless, but she left her children with her elderly mother to come. Even with the few people who had attended, if some of their needs could be met, something would be accomplished.

Ms. Kryzic asked what faith can she have and what values will her children learn. She agreed that paying council members minimum wage would not be bad, but asked whether they are really representing the public.

17) Helen Dutmer: Ms. Dutmer is a former councilwoman. She stated that in five minutes, she can only make a brief statement. She stated that the citizens were not being paid to attend this meeting. She said that Austin has a paid council and it has the worst Council in the state after San Antonio. In the Council-Manager type of government, the council members have never been paid. If you do not have the heart and the time, you should not run for office. Of course not everyone can serve, but \$20 a meeting is set in the Charter. It is not supposed to be an eight-hour a day job. The Council is supposed to study issues, pass policy and meet once a week.

She noted that the members get \$800 a month in expenses. She stated that some do not abide by the Charter because they do not document their expenses.

Under the Charter, the staff should follow the policies of Council in their work. If there is a problem with the policy, the Council should talk with the staff.

Term limits should be abolished. The government should be decided by the governed. The problem is that people are busy and they do not have the time to chase council members. This hall should have been far too small to hold the people attending. She stated that we are not dumbbells, but people do not vote because the issues have already been decided for you. The only thing that scares officials is people voting.

Ms. Dutmer stated that she is a Southsider, born headfirst and going out feet first. The City government is only as viable as the least represented.

If it were not for San Antonio, there would not be a Texas. And all of the City's history is south of Houston Street. We must take care of every sector of the City. San Pedro and Loop 419 is now the center of the City. The Center of the City has been lost. Ms. Dutmer asked 'who will stand for the Alamo now?'

In the fourteen years she served on the Council, she saw things that were questionable but she did not partake of it. She noted that her husband made a good living. She said that people before have served without pay. She stated that the public has a responsibility to learn the background of its officials.

18) Maria Magallanez: Ms. Magallanez advised that she wished to give her statement in Spanish. Ms. Magallanez stated that she is a mother who lives on the Southwest side of San Antonio. When the Council approved the housing project on the Southwest side, they did not give the people from that part of town a chance to voice their opinion against the project. The schools in the area are overflowing with children and there are not enough teachers. The Southwest side needs more help, more schools, more teachers and a hospital, instead of housing. The City also needs to clean Indian Creek.

She is a mother who works. The value of the homes in the area will decrease because of the housing project. She made a petition and collected signatures but no one paid attention. They sold the houses for a lot of money but the buyers did not know about the housing project. She said that people from the Southwest side should help because people outside the area do not understand.

19) Maria Gonzalez: Ms. Gonzalez is a Sky Harbor resident. She is concerned about gangs, crime and drugs and is worried about the housing project. She has a thirteen-year old son who is an honor student. She does not want to worry about her son being hurt. She will not be comfortable working and will drive him to and from school.

The same contractor is building the project. The decision was already made by the same councilman. She stated that the Council should tell the community before the project was approved to get the public's input.

Ms. Gonzalez stated that there should be background checks on council members. She has never been paid to be a volunteer. If they need to be treated like children, then ok. We need people who care.

20) Becky Gonzalez: She is a lifetime resident. She went to Palo Alto. She was the first person on her father's side to go to college. She has a degree in social work. She said that the process is hard, but necessary. In social work, they refer to such things as the "elephant in the living room." People feel that corruption has been around for years. We are in a reactive state now. Proactive would have been better, but we are here. She noted that social workers are governed by a code of ethics that are posted to serve as a reminder.

She said that she had attended the December 12, 2002 Council meeting and was appalled. At the end of the evening following the Executive Session, half of the council left. During the Citizens to be Heard part of the meeting following the Executive Session, a citizen was yelled at by a Councilman. He was told to sit down if he could not address the council correctly.

Ms. Gonzalez stated that the Southside is controversial, but she could say it and look it in the face. But never once has she seen a member of the community treated like that. She noted that she had been a school district trustee and had not been paid. Ms. Gonzalez said that giving Council members a salary and benefits might help them to conduct themselves as professionals.

Ms. Gonzalez noted that when the Ethics Review Board was formed, it was controversial. The Code was considered too harsh and the rules were changed. She asked the Committee to find out what was uncomfortable and why those rules were changed.

21) Laurie Baird: Ms. Baird was born and raised on the Southside. She stated that these people are grown-ups. If they have not learned how to behave, then you cannot train them.

Dr. Guzman thanked all those who attended and spoke.

Adjourn 8:45 P.M.